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WOMAN'S ACTUAL POSITION IN A REPUBLIC—A REJOINDER.

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AN article which appeared in these pages in August, entitled "Woman's Inferior Position in a Republic," gave such a gloomy picture of the condition of women in republics that I venture to bring forward a few facts which may serve to keep the sex in America from despair.

In perusing this article I was reminded of the terse statement in Mariette's "Uneven Civilization" respecting Egyptian dynasties: "The greatest obstacle to the establishment of a regular Egyptian chronology is the circumstance that the Egyptians themselves never had any chronology at all." Similarly, it is difficult to compare the political status of women in monarchies and republics, since, so far as general history shows, woman never had any real political position in either.

Mrs. Woolsey, it appears, may be classed among those zealous but timid pilots for women, who, instead of keeping the vessel well in the channel of progress, must needs (because of a trivial list, which could easily be adjusted by balancing facts) run the vessel ashore on shallow ground and call out to all passing vessels that the course is wrong.

History shows that, in the organization of modern civilized governments, no sweeping political concessions have ever been granted to women in any country, monarchical or republican, and it is, therefore, misleading to single out republics and assert that "the Constitution of the United States excludes women from its scope of justice." What monarchy, governmental union, or colony granted women full political rights in 1777? New Zealand does now, but did not at its origin.

The United States is not behind the Old World in granting political rights to women. On the contrary, it is conceded that the spirit and initiative in the struggle for equal rights came from the United States. Moreover, at the present moment the only places on the round globe where women have the same full, unrestricted political rights as men are four States of this republic—Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho. Within these States 200,000 women are entitled to vote exactly on the same basis as men, and are eligible to any and all State offices, some of which, indeed, are occupied by women.

Evidently, woman's political equality means to Mrs. Woolsey the inclusion of *some women*, as figureheads, in pageants and government. She prefers the spectacular to the practical. The theatricalism of the monarchy touches her, when the prosaic legislation of the republic escapes even her notice.

The struggle of the century for the recognition of the rights of humanity as against class rule is put aside by Mrs. Woolsey, in her argument, as a feeble and fruitless skirmish. Yet, as a result of this struggle, the twentieth century finds remaining but nine absolute monarchies—the names of most of them being anything but synonymous with progress, the highest civilization, or respect for women. These are Abyssinia, Afghanistan, China, Korea, Morocco, Persia, Russia, Siam, Turkey. The other eighteen or nineteen monarchies are but limited monarchies, which have adopted constitutions securing rights for individuals. The remaining twenty-three or twenty-four governments are republics; the United States leading as the shining example and hope for them all. So, even in monarchies men seem to cherish the belief that in constitutional government rests the hope of better, truer government.

It is further true that the liberation of British women from their historic thralldom, from their domestic serfdom and social and legal inferiorities, is coincidental with the extension and broadening of the suffrage, with the growth of democracy, and with the waning and attenuation of monarchism—in fact, with the Americanization of England.

The first two cases of sex humiliation cited by Mrs. Woolsey in her paper are so purely her personal experiences that they may be passed over without comment.

The third was so exceptional a case as to require supporting

testimony. "I heard native-born American ladies address a foreign-born committee of a legislature," says Mrs. Woolsey, "to plead for their enfranchisement." Within my knowledge, no foreign-born committee has ever been appointed in State or Federal affairs. That some foreign-born members may have served on the committee mentioned is probable. That a majority even were foreign-born is highly improbable, and it would be desirable to have the date and names of the committee for record.

I deeply sympathize with Mrs. Woolsey in her fourth affront, when she "witnessed a man who had emigrated from Ireland throw a petition, which was presented by American ladies, into a waste-paper basket with the remark, 'Legislators have more important matters to attend to than the affairs of women.'" This frankness was, indeed, rude. The more so as it came from a man born under a monarchical government, which "accords titles to women, names streets in their honor, and erects statues to their memory." Evidently, this Irishman was an exceptional boor, who failed to absorb from his birth-land the general political respect for women which, according to Mrs. Woolsey, a monarchy inspires.

It would appear, from all these cases of grievance put forth in Mrs. Woolsey's article as proofs that women are more important politically in monarchies than in republics, as if the State Legislatures and the Congress of the United States were largely composed of negroes and foreign-born citizens. As a matter of fact, in the present Congress there is not one colored man, and the proportion of foreign-born citizens is about four per cent. In State Legislatures the proportion of foreign-born members is somewhat larger, with the native-born element greatly in the majority. Further, the largest percentage of foreign-born legislators in America will be found in Western States—in the States where the largest measure of political equality has been granted to women.

It is a regrettable fact that, in the States where the foreign-born element is practically an unknown quantity (the States south of Mason and Dixon's line), the greatest number of barbaric legislative cruelties survive—child labor, inhuman treatment of criminals, and a stubborn resistance to the passage of all enlightened measures which are calculated to make woman the

political, legal and economic equal of man. This is the section of country from which Mrs. Woolsey comes, and from which she has evidently gathered her facts.

Mrs. Woolsey's instances may be extreme illustrations of the attitude of men towards women in the early years of the suffrage movement, but that time is past; and it is but just to the men of this republic that an article published in 1903 should represent their attitude now, instead of harking back to forty years ago.

From this republic, which to her mind is largely governed by foreign-born men who crush down women's rights, and which accords women few privileges (even refusing to let them take part in the Presidential inaugural procession), Mrs. Woolsey sailed for England. The first notable sight she witnessed there was "Queen Victoria passing through the streets of London upon a state occasion." Mrs. Woolsey was then most observant. She noted that, "in an aristocracy, a woman was at the head of the government"; "that a state occasion in a monarchy was not an affair of males, males, males"; and that the Queen "received more homage and honor in a few hours than the combined womanhood of the combined republics of the world had received in a hundred years." "There were women in the coach with the Queen, and women in attendance when she opened Parliament." Thus it was made obvious to Mrs. Woolsey that in England, unlike the régime in the United States, "the government was not of men, by men, and for men." She then, "for the first time in all her life, lifted her head with pride of sex."

Evidently, Mrs. Woolsey has not the republican spirit. The vicarious honors showered on a few women easily satisfied her pride of sex, and she hastily "realized that a woman can be the political head in a monarchy, but that in no republic can a woman ever reach this zenith and pinnacle of power." If the Queen or her attendants had held place by election, comparison might be made between them and the women of republics. It was accident of birth alone which gave them place; and, by a similar accident of birth, the great mass of English women are, by the same system, debarred from such exaltation to place and honor.

Mrs. Woolsey lost sight of another general fact when she remarked that the government of Great Britain, unlike that of the United States, is not one of males. Parliament is composed of men, the political offices are absorbed by men. The late Queen's

advisers were men, and the Governors of her colonies were men. The same is true of all other monarchies, with such signal exceptions as but prove the rule of male supremacy in a monarchy.

To place in contrast a republican woman with a Queen and say, "I saw that the former was the political inferior, while the latter was the political superior," is absurd.

The "sharp contrast" which is thus made apparent between the "first lady" in the United States, and the "first lady" in the largest aristocracy of Christendom was then "burned into Mrs. Woolsey's memory." If it had burned in deep enough to reach reason, the fact would have been evolved that, in the monarchical system, woman, as hereditary Queen, or as the mother of the heir to the throne, has precedence in pageant and state functions which places her outside comparison with any woman in a republic.

As to the assertion that not a single right, liberty or privilege enjoyed by woman in the United States is not also enjoyed by the women of Great Britain, I am profoundly more than willing to believe this, but that proves nothing to the point. The "Woman's Cause" has ever been one of "hands across the sea" between the women of Great Britain and the United States. I would, however, inform Mrs. Woolsey that the rights, privileges, and liberties enjoyed by British women were not the voluntary offering of the monarchy. These rights, like those of their sisters in America, were won by the hard-fought battles of women—women who were willing to bear opprobrium and humiliation, in the effort to persuade their brothers that their sex had rights apart from those conferred by male protection. Moreover, the rights are asked for in true republican spirit for *all* women, not for *some* women.

It is unfortunate for her qualifications to treat her subject with adequate knowledge of existing conditions that Mrs. Woolsey "kept her own counsel" so long, and failed to keep herself in touch with the "Woman's Cause," even if she were not willing to be identified with it. At the Councils of the "Woman's Cause" she would have learned that "if the first organized demand for the rights of women—made at the memorable convention of Seneca Falls, in 1848—had omitted the one for the franchise, those who made it would have lived to see all grant-

ed.”* The rights there named were “personal freedom, to acquire an education, to earn a living, to claim her wages, to own property, to make contracts, to bring suit, to testify in court, to obtain a divorce for just cause, to possess her children, to claim a fair share of the accumulations during marriage.” In many of the States all these privileges are now accorded, and in not one are all refused; but in 1848 most were denied in every State.

Moreover, if the original legal status of women in the United States was based on the assumption that woman was inferior to man, it was because of the common law of England, which was our inheritance from the British monarchy. Said Lord Brougham: “The common law in its attitude to women is the opprobrium of an age of Christianity.” In 1881, Wendell Phillips, in an address before Harvard College, said: “For forty years, earnest men and women, working noiselessly, have washed away this opprobrium.” The statute-books of thirty States have been remodelled away from the English common law, and woman stands to-day face to face with almost her last claim, the ballot.

Mrs. Woolsey tells us that ten years ago, according to certain data gathered by her and compared with Russian statistics, she found that “in America millions of wives had no individual control over their property,” while Russian wives had. In the early fifties New York State passed the Married Woman’s Property Bill, and Ohio, Maine, Indiana and Missouri followed the example. Many, if not all, States had passed such laws long before ten years ago—so the statement that millions of wives in America had no individual control over property at that time is not borne out by facts. If Mrs. Woolsey is desirous of making the political and legal condition of the women of America identical with that of Russian women, I can only say that, while her aspirations may amaze us, they will hardly lead us back there; and I doubt very much whether any Russian woman of education and knowledge regards her lot as happier and more equitable than ours. This, after all, is apparently merely a question of choice and taste.

The nature of the rights of Russian women may be judged by the following:

“The married Russian woman is in the full power of her husband, though she is mistress of her own fortune.”

* Extract from Introduction to “The History of Woman’s Suffrage,” Volume IV., p. xiii.

"Russian women vote on an equality with men for members of the municipal councils and county assemblies, but the Russian woman does not appear at the polls, but is represented by some male relative or friend, who casts the vote."

"The Russian woman, except that she is ineligible for office, possesses all the political rights of the Russian man."*

The same authority sums up the political rights of women by saying: "The Russian woman is downtrodden by society and state, and seeks consolation in religion."

As to the addresses of Mrs. Woolsey before women anarchists, the sentiments she expressed seem to have been as insidiously anarchistic as any they themselves could hope to propagate. The statement that "the Constitution of the United States excluded women from its scope of justice" will not bear examination. Women were excluded from political rights, but political rights must not be confounded with natural rights even by one addressing anarchists—particularly when the monarchies lauded never afforded the precedent of including women in the first grant of political rights.†

By grouping together Republicanism, Socialism and Anarchism as three forces which make against woman's political emancipation, Mrs. Woolsey suggests that her idea of republicanism is that it means the rule of the mob.

Nor is she more happy in her allusions to the republics which lie to the south of us. The conditions inherited from Spanish law and custom are, quite likely, different from the fruits of the wholly ideal English common law, but the Spanish woman seems to have no complaint to make. Certainly, those who know our Spanish-American neighbors best do not hesitate to speak in admiration of the beauty, tenderness and gracious felicity of domestic life in those republics which are alleged to be anarchistic.

If what Mrs. Woolsey contends as to women's position in republics be true, then may we decide that as humanity approaches

* "History of Woman's Suffrage," Volume III., page 915.

† "Natural or human rights exist for the individual, while political rights, though granted to individuals, do not exist for him, but for the massed interests of the public. Political rights are conferred by the law interpreting the general interests, suitably to the ideas, needs, and prejudices of the place, time, and age in which they are conferred."

governmental perfection it is really retrograding to a point inferior to the brute creation. But the masses of women do not believe this. On the contrary, the women of this republic, even those of the "Woman's Cause," are hopeful, and assured that the position of woman under republics is as sure, honorable and open to advancement in all directions, as that of *the* women (not *some* women) of any monarchy now existing. "To say, in this age of the world, that women under any form of government on the face of the globe are better off than the women in the United States, is false. Our schools are absolutely free. With two or three exceptions all colleges are open to women. Half our States have granted school suffrage. Tax suffrage exists in five or six, and municipal in Kansas. Besides, we have four with full suffrage—Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho. The women of the United States, the nearest a true republic, are vastly freer in every department of life than under any form of monarchical government under the sun."*

FANNIE HUMPHREYS GAFFNEY.

* Extract from letter of Susan B. Anthony to the writer anent the article, "Woman's Inferior Position in a Republic."